

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00
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R 020334Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0816
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 3640

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAIR PEPR KS UR
SUBJ: KAL INCIDENT AND ROK-SOVIET RELATIONS

1. A CONSISTENT ELEMENT IN BACKGROUND OF ROK REACTION TO KAL INCIDENT, APART FROM RATHER FULSOME GRATITUDE FOR U.S. ASSISTANCE, HAS BEEN CAUTIOUS HOPE THAT SOVIET ACTION OFFERS INDICATION THAT IMPROVEMENT IN ROK-SOVIET RELATIONS IS POSSIBLE. PRESIDENT PAK'S STATEMENT THANKING SOVIETS FOR RELEASE OF PASSENGERS AND SOFT-PEDALING SOVIET CULPABILITY IN ATTACKING THE AIRCRAFT WAS CLEARLY DESIGNED TO MAXIMIZE BOTH THE SHORT-TERM CHANCES OF OBTAINING THE PASSENGERS' RETURN AND THE LONG-RANGE PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVING BILATERAL RELATIONS. DURING DISCUSSION WITH THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PEACEFUL UNIFICATION CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL ON APRIL 26, FOREIGN MINISTER PAK CONFIRMED THAT THE ROKG WAS PLANNING "POSITIVE DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION" IN FOLLOWING UP THE INCIDENT. THIS WEEK ROK FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS HAVE ADVISED US
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THAT SOVIET DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL IN THIRD COUNTRIES HAVE COMMENTED ON PRESIDENT PAK'S STATEMENT IN FAVORABLE TERMS AND PILOT KIM REPORTEDLY TOLD PRESS THAT SOVIET NEWSMEN, INFORMING HIM OF THE STATEMENT, ALSO INDICATED GRATIFICATION WITH ITS TONE.

2. ROK OFFICIALS ARE OFFICIALLY CAUTIOUS ABOUT DISPLAYING

TOO MUCH OPTIMISM OR OVER-PLAYING THEIR HAND, BUT THEIR OPTIMISM IS HARD TO SUPPRESS. AT THE SAME TIME, WE NOTE THAT NORTH KOREA, AFTER AN INITIAL REPORT OF THE PLANE'S FORCED LANDING, HAS AVOIDED ALL REFERENCE TO THE INCIDENT, AND IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT PYONGYANG IS AS CONCERNED AS SEOUL IS HOPEFUL OVER ANY SIGNS OF SOVIET GESTURES TOWARD THE ROK.

3. AT PRESENT, PRESS INTEREST FOCUSES ON THE FLIGHT AND VOICE RECORDERS THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE RETAINED AND THERE IS SPECULATION ABOUT POSSIBLE ROK REQUESTS FOR THEIR RETURN. WE ALSO NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT ARTICLE 26 OF THE ICAO AGREEMENT (TO WHICH THE ROK AND USSR ARE BOTH SIGNATORIES) PROVIDES FOR THE NATION OF REGISTRY OF AN AIRLINER TO HAVE AN OBSERVER PRESENT AT THE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT, AND WE ASSUME ROKG MAY BE CONSIDERING SUCH A REQUEST. WE WOULD APPRECIATE ADDRESSEES' COMMENTS ON PROSPECTS FOR SUCH ACTIONS, IF THE SUBJECT SHOULD BE RAISED BY ROKG, AND GUIDANCE FROM DEPARTMENT ON HOW WE SHOULD FIELD SUCH A REQUEST IF RECEIVED.
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